

A Church Disaster Relief Committee should be elected by the church membership, headed by a church disaster relief director who will give general direction to mitigation, preparation, organization and training. The Disaster Relief Committee should perform the following functions:

- Conduct a survey of church members' skills, gifts, talents, and willingness to serve.
  - Provide regular, up-to-date training.
  - Lead the church to approve making facilities and equipment available for disaster relief ministries.
  - Begin and maintain a crisis closet, food pantry, et cetera.
  - Secure approval of the church to cooperate with other local churches, the association, state disaster relief director, American Red Cross, civic and government agencies.
  - Contact government and American Red Cross authorities for the names of those who will direct disaster operations.
  - Be alert for local and nearby crises that present the church opportunities to witness and minister through disaster relief. These may be large-scale crises, such as tornadoes, floods, and winter storms or pandemics. Short-term crises, such as fires in single family dwellings, accidents, vandalism, and acts of crime are also opportunities to minister. Churches should report any actions and register them with local authorities, and the state disaster relief director.
  - Identify and assign volunteers according to talent sheets.
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- Conduct damage assessment in the community and notify local, associational and state disaster directors.

Responsibilities of church disaster relief leaders:

### **Church Disaster Relief Director:**

- Chair the Disaster Relief Committee.
- Assemble a Church Disaster Response Team.
- Schedule planning and preparation meetings and activities.
- Schedule training.
- Enlist a church resources coordinator and help that person establish a plan of action and carry out duties listed below.
- Enlist a church volunteer coordinator and help that person to establish a plan of action and carry out the duties listed below.
- Relate to associational disaster response coordinator, local American Red Cross Chapter and government authorities.
- Serve on planning and coordinating groups before, during, and following a disaster.
- Alert coordinators and the Church Disaster Relief Committee.
- Prepare the team to respond.

### **Church Resources Coordinator:**

- Conduct an inventory of building facilities, equipment, supplies, and vehicles that might be used during a disaster.
- Determine, with the whole committee, what to recommend to the church regarding the use of facilities and equipment during a disaster.
- Enlist volunteers to assist with plans adopted by the church regarding the use of church facilities and equipment.

### **Church Volunteer Coordinator:**

- Conduct a skills and talent survey of the church membership. Develop a database of volunteers and skills.
- Arrange for orientation and training.
- Organize teams by skills; choose team leaders.

- Establish a telephone chain for notifying volunteers when a response is possible. Use non-disaster volunteers for calling.
- Activate the church disaster relief telephone chain.
- Gather volunteers at the church or other location for assignment to duties and work locations.

#### Possible Church Opportunities and Action

Churches can assist with mitigation, preparation, warning, rescue and evacuation. They can also provide facilities, volunteers and supplies to supplement or assist the American Red Cross with emergency feeding, shelter, childcare or other functions. Church facilities can be used as an information or advocacy center for victims. Churches can also provide pastoral counseling or crisis intervention.

Other opportunities for churches to minister during a disaster is to:

- Finance a line of credit for authorized applicants to secure clean up or repair products and secure and disburse grants or loans for emergency needs.
- Identify volunteers (in the church or in the community) who can give legal or business advice regarding insurance, repair contracts, applications for loans or grants.
- Locate qualified people to care for children, as well as elderly, ill and disabled who need special facilities, diets, transportation and recreation.
- Identifying members who will provide temporary housing for victims, bilingual interpretation or assist with those who have language or literacy limitations.
- Provide companionship to people who have been displaced and are unfamiliar with their new surroundings, community services and stores.
- Participate in ministries such as the receiving, sorting and distributing of clothing, bedding, bulk food, clean-up and household supplies.
- Provide food, housing, communication and other needs for out-of-town volunteers who come to help with the disaster response.
- Cooperate with other agencies in times of disaster, have a voice in rebuilding and relocating, and make sure victims are treated the same in regard to physical, social and spiritual recovery.
- Begin a transportation bank by developing a database of cars, vans, pickup and dump trucks, boats, planes, and so forth that might be available for use during a disaster.
- Organize clean-up, salvage, security or repair crews, as well as help victims clean their homes and furniture, install temporary roofing or board up windows and doors or remove household contents for safe storage.

#### Church Preparation

Advance planning is the key to serving effectively in a disaster. The preparation may be of an emergency nature. Sometimes we must react to people's needs spontaneously, but even in a crisis, we fall back on what we have learned from experience and training. When disaster strikes, capable church leaders can still find time to quickly brainstorm how their facilities can best be used in the crisis and how to make their facilities available to relief efforts.

Long-range planning is the best answer. Churches will have time to investigate, learn, decide, plan, and develop a plan before disaster strikes. If no advance preparation has been made, opportunities will be limited. Before taking a plan for church disaster ministry to the congregation for approval, capable leaders must have done their homework. Although members may not approve a cut-and-dried plan, they will appreciate advance preparation. They will have questions. If the leaders don't have the answers, ask the congregation for time to find solutions before they vote on the proposal.

Consider the following suggestions as you organize your church in disaster relief:

- Discuss the idea with the pastor.
- Complete the checklist for a Church's Potential for Disaster Response.
- Discuss the possibilities with the church volunteer organizations.
- Consider finances. How will the ministry be paid for?
- Be ready to recommend a leadership team - people willing to work and willing to enlist others to do so.
- Discuss ways the ministry might be used in the church's community, or how it will contribute to state and associational disaster relief.
- Make a list of possible services. Try to find out what other churches have done and give examples.
- Contact the local American Red Cross and county emergency services agency for information on how the church can help them in case of a disaster.
- Select one or more services to recommend to the church, or get input from other church members in deciding on a ministry.

A local church can be involved in one or more of the following ministries that use the church building or another location that may be available to the church:

- Feeding - church facilities or mobile unit
- Child care - church facilities or mobile unit
- Elder care - church or other facilities
- Information center in the church building
- Service center for American Red Cross
- Clothing bank
- Crisis closets (clothing, food, etc.)
- Collection station for supplies
- Distribution center for goods and supplies
- Storage
- Communication center - church facilities or mobile unit
- Shelter
- Medication dispensing site

The following could require a mobile unit:

- Feeding team
- Child care
- Emergency medical unit
- Transportation (use of church van, etc.)
- Communications center unit

The following would require special training or experience for team members:

- Crisis counseling
- Emergency medical
- Advocacy
- Cleanup and repair

The following would require acquisition, storage, and distribution of special equipment:

- Wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, et cetera.
- Cots, mattresses, bedding
- Oxygen tanks (if legal in the area)
- Chainsaw and tree removal equipment
- Cleaning and sanitation equipment and supplies

Church Follow-up

Respond to church requests should take the following actions:

- Begin immediately implementing the planning process.
- Work within the organization assigned the task by the church.
- Enlist and elect a director.
- Divide the workload among individuals or subcommittees. Obtain any needed information.
- Follow through on plans for financing the project.
- Secure calendar time for planning and for workdays.
- Ask church members to complete a skill survey.
- Complete detailed facility, equipment, and vehicle surveys.
- Create a plan for promotion and for communication.
- Ensure safety during a disaster response.

Cooperate with other agencies to:

- Reach an agreement with state or associational disaster relief programs, if applicable.
- Arrange for training: required and specialized.
- Reach agreement with other agencies active in disaster response.
- Secure permits, codes, licenses, certification, insurance, et cetera.